

U.S. Warns Russians On Sub Base in Cuba

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9/26/70

The Nixon administration said yesterday that the Soviet Union may be building a strategic base in Cuba and warned that any such development would be viewed "with the utmost seriousness."

A White House official, who declined to be quoted by name, was asked about reports of a permanent Soviet missile-submarine base under construction at Cienfuegos, a deep-water port on Cuba's south coast.

"We are watching it very closely," the official said. "The Soviet Union can be under no doubt that we would view the establishment of a strategic

base in the Caribbean with the utmost seriousness."

He said United States policy was still that enunciated during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis by President Kennedy, who said that peace could be maintained if Soviet offensive weapons were removed from the Caribbean and kept out in the future.

"We are watching the events in Cuba," the official said. "We are not at this moment in a position to say what they mean . . . Nothing very rapid and dramatic is likely to occur."

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The White House warning followed earlier reports of a visit to Cuba by a small Soviet task force, including a guided missile cruiser, a guided missile destroyer, a tanker and a submarine tender. The tender has been in Cienfuegos harbor several weeks.

Earlier yesterday, in response to newsmen's queries, Jerry W. Friedheim, deputy assistant secretary of defense for public affairs, said that Soviet ships had moved three heavy barges and other equip-

ment into Cienfuegos harbor during the past few weeks. This, he said, "makes us feel they may be seeking sustained capabilities in the area."

Asked if the Cienfuegos installation might serve as a Caribbean base for the Soviet Yankee-class submarines (similar to U.S. Polaris submarines), Friedheim said:

"We can't rule out that possibility."

The barges brought into

Cienfuegos, Friedheim said, were first transported aboard a Soviet amphibious ship across the Atlantic, then off-loaded, possibly in Havana, and towed around the island to Cienfuegos.

"We are not sure that they are building a submarine support facility," Friedheim said in part. "There are some new naval facilities in the Cienfuegos area within the past several months. Some of the Soviet support ships have visited there. There are no submarines there at present."

As Friedheim noted, Daniel Hankin, his immediate superior, said in a Monday speech that the Soviet Union was showing an "apparent intention" to be able to conduct "sustained surface and submarine operations in the Caribbean."

The administration has been worried for several weeks about Soviet activity in the Caribbean which some officials linked to Soviet testing of U.S. resolve in the Mideast crisis.

At that time, nine days ago, the administration officials reported it was not clear what the Russians were up to in the Caribbean.

According to several U.S.

Navy sources, the Russians do not need a secluded base like Cienfuegos unless they plan to support a permanent naval presence or stockpile sophisticated equipment.

The U.S. Navy has such bases at Rota, Spain, and Holy Loch, Scotland.

Like the U.S. fleet, the Soviet Navy has support ships which can repair and replenish supplies at sea. Big Soviet Navy ships can stop off at Havana where some 30 well-equipped Soviet trawlers sortie forth to gather intelligence as well as fish.

On Sept. 16, administration officials in Chicago briefed Midwest editors on foreign affairs including the latest Soviet Navy visit to Cuba. (Under the briefing ground rules, the officials could not be identified).

If the Soviet Union started operating strategic forces such as Polaris-type submarines, the officials said, the Nixon administration would study this very carefully.

If the United States put its Polaris submarines into the Black Sea (which borders on the Soviet Union), the officials said, the newspapers would describe it as provocative, although there is no legal restriction on such a U.S. move.

But both Americans and Russians, the officials said, have to decide whether they want to hold back on some legally-permissible military moves, in the interests of some longer-term settlement, or to press every advantage they have a legal right to take.

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